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Washington

The 22 of February
by Mr. Rush.



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THE 22d OF FEBRUARY.

From

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B. M. Rush

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THE following Sketch from the Philadelphia "Pennsylvania Inquirer" of the 22d February, 1851, signed MEDIATOR, is understood to have been written by MR. RUSH. It is republished in its present form, for private circulation, and, it may be added, without any agency or knowledge on his part.

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THE 22d OF FEBRUARY.

“Time, which is continually washing away the dissoluble fabrics of other Poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakspeare.”

If Johnson uttered the above sentiment of the greatest dramatic poet of our language, with how far more potent a sweep over the feelings and destiny of men and nations, may it be said of WASHINGTON, that time, however it may obscure or diminish the fame of other statesmen, is perpetually brightening the imperishable tablets of his.

And if Lamartine, when the whirlwind of the late French Revolution was confounding all safe principles in free government, and sweeping away man after man, raised up as the ephemeral idols of deluding and dangerous applause, exclaimed, that “THE WANT OF THE AGE WAS A EUROPEAN WASHINGTON,” with how much deeper an interest ought not all of

us here in America to lay to heart, on this anniversary of his birth-day, the precepts of his matchless wisdom and almost super-human virtue?

His Farewell Address to the people of the United States, on laying down the Presidency, at the end of the eighth year after he had exercised it, has become like household words in every American family.

His address to Congress at Annapolis, on resigning his military commission as Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the Revolution, presents a transcendent instance of the moral sublime. If the great Conde was seen to shed tears at the performance of one of Corneille's tragedies, where Cæsar is made to utter a fine sentiment, what American heart can ever remain unmoved whilst reading this majestically simple, yet infinitely touching address? Manly tears have moistened many an eye in perusing it. The long, doubtful, and bloody war ended; its object accomplished in the establishment of the independence and liberties of his country, mainly through his own unconquerable firmness and never-dying, ever-active patriotism; all his toils and solitudes at length over—then it is that, at a

public audience, rendered impressive in the highest degree by the innate dignity of his form and presence, he comes forward, and, amidst a breathless silence in Congress and all spectators, bids "*an affectionate farewell to the august body under whose orders he had so long acted, and resigns with satisfaction the appointment he accepted with diffidence.*" Such was the modest language of a man whom no dangers could appal, whose spirit ever rose in proportion to their magnitude, and who, had he obeyed the impulses of his eager, native valor, would have ruined his country, instead of keeping her safe in the gloomiest of times, and crowning her at last with supreme victory and glory, by mingling the qualities of Fabius with those of Marcellus.

Appropriately did the President of Congress reply to this beautiful address, that the "*glory of his virtues would not terminate with his military command, but continue to animate remotest ages.*" May they help to guide our footsteps in this stage of our national existence! We should pay him but a blind reverence if, contenting ourselves with only eulogistic words, and none can come up to his

transcendent deeds, we fail to be influenced in our conduct by what he said and did.

These two memorable addresses are familiar to the community. Less generally so is his letter of June, '83, written officially to the Governors of the several States. Seeing this document lately referred to in a manner very striking, I took from my library the English Annual Register for that year, in which I found it; for even then the fame of its author had gone forth world-wide. Marshall, to whom I have since turned, of course gives it. He calls it the "paternal and affectionate Letter" of the great Chief. The introductory part is as follows: "The object for which I had the honor to hold an appointment in the service of my country being accomplished, I am now preparing to resign it into the hands of Congress, and to return to that retirement which, it is well known, I left with the greatest reluctance; a retirement for which I have never ceased to sigh through a long and painful absence, and in which (remote from the noise and trouble of the world), I meditate to pass the remainder of life in a state of undisturbed repose. But before I carry this resolution into effect, I think it a duty incumbent

upon me, to make this my last official communication; to congratulate you on the glorious events which Heaven has been pleased to produce in our favor; to offer my sentiments respecting some important subjects which appear to me to be intimately connected with the tranquility of the United States; to take my leave of your Excellency as a public character; and to give my final blessing to that country in whose service I have spent the prime of my life, for whose sake I have consumed so many anxious days and watchful nights, and whose happiness, being extremely dear to me, will always constitute no inconsiderable part of my own. Impressed with the liveliest sensibility on this pleasing occasion, I will claim the indulgence of dilating the more copiously on the subjects of our mutual felicitation. When we consider the magnitude of the prize we contended for, the doubtful nature of the contest, and the favorable manner in which it has terminated, we shall find the greatest possible reason for gratitude and rejoicing."

After some intervening passages in the spirit of the foregoing, the letter proceeds to its grand purpose.

“There are four things,” says the great writer, “which I humbly conceive are essential to the well-being, I may venture to say to the existence, of the United States as an independent power.

1st. “AN INDISSOLUBLE UNION OF THE STATES UNDER ONE FEDERAL HEAD.

2d. “A sacred regard to public justice.

3d. “The adoption of a proper peace establishment. And

4th. “The prevalence of that pacific and friendly disposition, among the people of the United States, which will induce them to FORGET THEIR LOCAL PREJUDICES AND POLITICS, to make those mutual concessions WHICH ARE REQUISITE TO THE GENERAL PROSPERITY, and, in some instances, TO SACRIFICE THEIR INDIVIDUAL ADVANTAGES TO THE INTEREST OF THE COMMUNITY.”

How precisely apposite to our present condition, how awakening to us all, these distinct propositions, here stated as if to be called up for our political salvation at this era? They foreshadow the substance of the federal constitution as afterwards formed in 1789. Throughout the remainder of the letter the heads laid down are each dilated upon with

the force of reason, and in the tone of moral elevation characteristic of his majestic mind.

I say that my attention was strikingly called to this circular letter to the Governors of the old thirteen States, when the war closed. It was in the National Intelligencer of the 16th of last month, that I saw it noticed thus: "This letter, much less known and studied than the Farewell Address of Washington, is worthy, for its fervid patriotism and profound political wisdom, of being engraved, by the side of that Address, on the base of the monument now rising on the banks of the Potomac to his memory." These are emphatic words. They convey exalted homage, but not too exalted. They are given editorially. I select them from one of a series of numbers, in all five, which have appeared in that paper in the course of the last and present month, each quite elaborate, and all bearing upon the present position of South Carolina towards the Union. They are replete with facts and reflections spreading over the past, applicable to the present, and piercing into the future. If the judgments of some might not accede to all the points they cover, every reader will see in these discussions, the marks of superior

ability and enlargement. The number which appeared on the 18th of January, is a *résumé*, in the spirit of history, of political events in their broad outline, since the beginning of the government, chiefly selected and interwoven, however, to illustrate the Carolina topics, with their various adjuncts of tariffs, primary conventions, nullification and secession. Whatever opinions these veteran editors may ever entertain, their thoughts run in a statesman-like strain. Longer established at the seat of government than any others—where the best political information and intercourse are attainable; constantly associating with the foremost men of the land, and distinguished foreigners, to whose conversation and friendship their merits have fully commended them, their advantages have been pre-eminent, and their own enlarged capacities have abundantly improved them. It has so come to pass, that their journal, for nearly half a century, has held on to the tenor of its course, uniting decorum with intellectual ability and power. This is an enviable lot; and its continuance through a period so long, is a rare lot for any daily journal, in any country, where party spirit is ever prevailing, with its

roughness, its bitterness, its exaggerations, and its misleading passions; and it moreover honorably attests, that the restraining spirit of gentlemen when carried into the editorial profession, will, after all, lay the most enduring claims to public favor and respect in newspapers that observe it.

If I pay a passing tribute to this prominent and long established journal, the explanation is, that the discussions to which I have alluded in its columns have prompted me to this communication. Able as they are, and national and patriotic as is the spirit in which they are conceived, I cannot forbear, under all the actual circumstances of our country, the interposition of something in the nature of a present *caveat* as to some things that struck me whilst perusing them. I do not, I cannot, deny facts which they bring into view respecting South Carolina. Too many of them are but too well founded; but I would wish to shut out, at this epoch, conclusions which these discussions would seem to think inevitable. I cannot, will not, think Carolina yet lost to the Union. Sad would be that loss. Greatly the more sad, when I look at the ample list presented in one of the numbers, of eminent and accomplished

Carolínians; a list very remarkable, considering the relative smallness of the State, who have been in high service under the general government; and when I recall the other names to which she could proudly point, known to national fame, which are not upon that list. *To the last*, I will still hope for her allegiance to the Union, which, in her day, she has so greatly honored, by the genius, the cultivation, the useful services, and lofty spirit of her sons. It will never be too late for her to reconsider her own adverse determinations, even if she may have gravely formed them.

If change of mind be sometimes the highest merit in individuals, for communities to change, on conviction of sufficient grounds, would only be evincive of still higher magnanimity and wisdom. I cling then to the hope, that the great name of WASHINGTON may not be without its effect in awakening her to the reconsideration of her purposes, and that this anniversary of his birth-day, may be improved to so great an end. Some of the most illustrious of her sons were the companions of Washington, his most cherished, most confidential friends, in council and in the field. Will his mighty name go for nothing among the des-

cendants of those renowned and gallant Carolinians who lived with him, counselled with him, went to battle and to victory with him; a name that concentrates the wisdom of ages and of millions? Will they forget all that he said, all that he did, in favor of the Union, both before and after it was formed? Will they take the last step, without weighing his advice to forego local feelings, and even to make, to some extent, individual sacrifices, rather than lose the unspeakably preponderating benefits of UNION? AGAIN I SAY THAT I CANNOT, WILL NOT, YET BELIEVE IT.

MEDIATOR.

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